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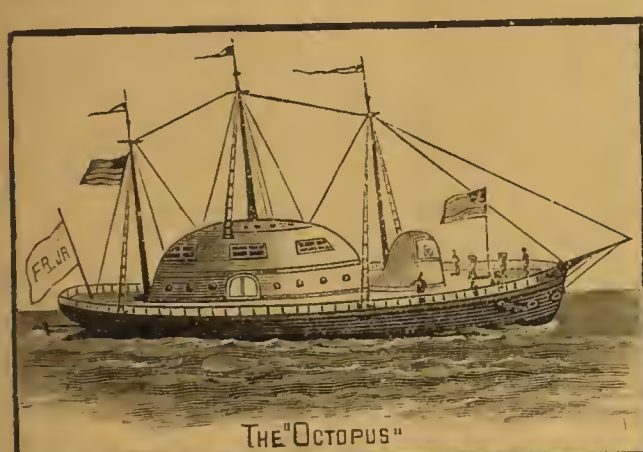
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THE BLACK LAGOON;

Or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Submarine Search
for a Sunken City in Russia.

By "NONAME."



THE "OCTOPUS"



On either side were doors of steel leading into chambers arched with stone. Count Potolski could not restrain himself, and placing his helmet close to Frank's, he shouted: "These are the treasure vaults without doubt. Now we shall see their contents. At last, at last!" With which Potolski pushed his way into the nearest chamber.

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THE BLACK LAGOON;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr.'s Submarine Search for a Sunken City in Russia.

AN EXCITING STORY OF THE LAND OF THE SLAVS.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "The Desert of Death," "The Caribs' Cave," "The Lost Lake," "37 Bags of Gold," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE COUNT'S MISSION.

FRANK READE, JR., the young inventor, whose fame is world-wide, had just written his name upon the register of a large New York hotel, and handed his grip to the boy in waiting.

"Frank Reade, Jr., Readestown."

The clerk mechanically marked the number of the room opposite his name, and turned to get the key. At that moment a peculiar thing happened.

A tall, dark-complexioned man, with long force mustache, stood behind Frank, and now took up the pen to register also. In a sprawling hand he indited on the page the following:

"Nikolai Potolski, Warsaw, Poland."

It chanced that Frank was so near that he could easily observe the name thus written, which he did carelessly, giving the new-comer a quick comprehensive glance, as one will a foreigner.

But the Pole, for such he was, suddenly dropped his pen and stared at the page. He had chanced to note the name preceding his.

Putting his finger upon Frank's name, he addressed the clerk:

"Can you tell me, sir, if this gentleman is still at this hotel?"

The clerk turned in surprise, and shot a quick glance at Frank. The latter, in his turn, was astonished. Instinctively the Pole also turned his gaze eagerly upon Frank.

He was a man of distinguished bearing and spoke English fluently. For a moment there was a pause.

"I am the man," said Frank. "What can I do for you, sir?"

Count Potolski, for such he was, held out his hand in Yankee fashion. His manner was large and hearty.

"You can do more for me than any other man on earth," he said.

"I have come all the way from the Ukraine in Southern Russia, to see you."

"An agreeable surprise!" said Frank, favorably impressed with the other.

"And a fortunate coincidence for me," declared the Pole, "It seems like a genuine working of Fate. But pardon me, I will not detain you at present."

"I am only on my way to my room," replied Frank. "I can meet you at dinner, or in the reading room at such hour as you may wish!"

"Thank you! I will be glad to dine at the same table and later, perhaps we can adjourn to my apartments for my errand is one implying some secrecy!"

Frank was still greater astonished. But he bowed courteously and merely said:

"I am at your service!"

Then the count went out to see about his luggage, while Frank accompanied by Barney and Pomp, his two faithful adherents, went to his own apartments. The more he reflected upon this strange meeting the more puzzled he became.

"It is odd!" he muttered. "I can hardly understand what this Polish gentleman can want of me. Certainly I never saw him before in my life."

"Begorra, av he's an Anarchist it's a bad thing for him!" declared Barney, with a comical duck of his red head. "I'll be afther kapin' me eyes on him!"

"An Anarchist!" exclaimed Frank, with a laugh. "Where do you get such an idea, Barney?"

"Shure, sor, dou't the most av thim bloody vilyuns cum from Rooshia?"

Frank laughed earnestly.

"I hardly think Count Potolski is an Anarchist," he said.

"Golly!" muttered Pomp, rolling his eyes and showing his ivories. "Wha' yo' fink if dat chap should blow us all to kingdom cum wif a dynamite bomb, Pish?"

"Bejabbers, it's moighty little thinking any av us wud be doin'," declared Barney, "at least not in this worrld!"

"Hnbl does yo' spec to go dar?"

"Av I do, I'll niver see the loikes av yez therel"

"Wha' you say, chile? I done reckon mah chances am as good as yo's nm!"

"Dat ain' sayin' herry much either," concluded Pomp after a moment's reflection. But both knew better than to get into an altercation before Frank. The young inventor was busy just now with some letters.

Barney and Pomp occupied adjoining rooms, whither they now repaired, leaving Frank to himself.

A short while later Frank went down to dinner. The count was at the table and a pleasant chat was indulged in. Then the count led the way to his own apartments.

As they entered, Frank saw that the Pole's valet had arranged a number of large and ancient looking maps upon a table. The count motioned Frank to be seated.

A decanter of wine and glasses were on the table also, and some choice cigars. It was evident that the count was a convivial host.

For some while they smoked and conversed. Potolski showing himself a scholar and an artist in the art of conversation. But finally he brought matters to a point in a deft manner.

"I will tell you a story of my ancestors," he said, "and I have sufficient egotism to believe that it will claim your interest. At first you may wonder what relation it can have with my errand to you. But all shall be explained."

The count slipped some wine and went on with his narrative.

"Two hundred years ago in a beautiful and fertile valley, between the Duelper and the river Bug, in that part of Russia known as the Ukraine, was the thrifty little principality of Makunova. The noble Prince Erdinn Potolski was the ruler of this region under Carolus, the Polish king.

"From time immemorial war had existed at irregular intervals

throughout all the Ukraine between the Zaporozhians or Cossacks of the Steppes, the Tartars as their natural allies and the Poles. All the petty principalities, such as this of Makhuova, were compelled to stand in momentary readiness to defend their lands from devastation, for a worse horde of barbarians than those of the Steppes never existed.

"When the great uprising under the traitor Hienelnitski convulsed the entire Ukraine with war, this long, deep and fertile valley of Makhuova was one of the first spots attacked by the barbarians. They poured into the valley in fearful numbers and awful fighting was the result.

"But Makhuova was so splendidly fortified, and the valor of the Prince Potolski so great that the Zaporozhians were beaten and forced to withdraw. Failing to carry the valley by storm, they resorted to another method for the gaining of an awful revenge.

"The River Dneiper—at this point a deep and sluggish stream—passed the eastern end of the great valley, which itself was much below the level of the river, and guarded from its waters simply by a narrow water shed. The Zaporozhians, ten thousand strong, began with pick and spade to remove this water shed, so that the Dneiper might flood the valley.

"As it chanced, Prince Potolski, his family and his suite had left for Warsaw to attend the Interregum or election, else I would not be here at this moment, for the prince is my direct ancestor. So they escaped the awful deluge which ensued.

"One dark night, when the city of Makhuova and the entire valley was in the depth of slumber, the flood gates were opened. The great current of the Dneiper shot down into the valley for a length of forty miles, carrying all before it. Every village was wiped out, Makhuova submerged a hundred feet, and every life in the valley taken. It was a fearful deed.

"Not one of the luckless people escaped. But the news spread to Warsaw. The king ordered troops to the number of fifty thousand under Prince Potolski to the spot. But nothing could be done.

"The Zaporozhians fled to the Steppes. The prince and his army looked with grief unspeakable upon the awful scene. There was no way to drive the water out of the valley again. There it must remain and the towns and habitations submerged to the end of time. Makhuova was literally wiped from the map and in its place there was only a deep stagnant and black lagoon, which the peasants shunned as the abode of devils and foul spirits.

"Here on this map you may see the spot marked. The Dneiper still flows sluggishly on its original course. Where once was a smiling, populous valley there has existed for two hundred years only the Black Lagoon."

The count paused, and Frank studied the map closely. He was intensely interested in the strange story.

"You may understand," said the count, "that but for this bit of fiendish work on the part of the barbarians the Black Lagoon might to-day have been yet a prosperous principality and I might have been the reigning prince. As it is, I am only Count Potolski, with a very modest estate in Lublin near Warsaw, a good subject of the Czar. That is all."

"Your story is most interesting," replied Frank. "I have never heard a stranger one. You say there is possibly no way of emptying this lagoon?"

"Absolutely none. Save where it connects with the Dneiper it is surrounded by high mountains."

"But—there must be much of value buried in the depths of that lagoon—"

"Ah, that is it!" cried Potolski. "All the wealth of Makhuova. And it is all legally mine."

"If you could recover it—"

"It would put me on my feet and I might become one of the richest nobles in Russia."

"Have you never tried it?"

"Ah, divors cannot descend safely to that depth, and I cannot find those who will dare to make the attempt. This brings us to an understanding. You may guess now what has brought me to America to see you."

"Be more explicit."

"I will. You have invented a submarine boat, which travels at any depth under water?"

Frank gave a start.

"Yes," he replied, "I have perfected such an invention. I think I understand you. You want my help in exploring the Black Lagoon?"

"That is just it."

"And for this reason you have come to America to see me?"

"You have guessed it."

For some moments Frank studied the ancient maps. Then he asked: "How will you get the submarine boat to the Black Lagoon?"

"Easily," replied the Pole, eagerly. "By means of the Bosphorus, the Black Sea, and up the Dneiper. I know a method of going around the Cataracts. There is small risk. In the present precarious state of my fortunes this means much to me. You shall name your own price. What is your answer?"

Frank Reade, Jr., arose.

"Myself and my boat are at your service," he said.

We will now change the scene of our story to Readestown.

Concluding his arrangements with Count Potolski, Frank had started at once for home with Barney and Pomp. Immediately upon his arrival the great machine works presented a scene of great activity.

There was much to be done to prepare the submarine boat for its long cruise to distant parts of the world.

To be sure it was in a completed state and floated now in the basin in the big yard, which was connected with the river by means of a canal and locks.

The Octopus, as the boat was christened, needed to be thoroughly equipped with supplies and outfit in general, such as would be needed on a long voyage.

Frank reckoned that it would take at least three months to visit and explore the Black Lagoon and return home.

Therefore the boat must be supplied with provisions for that length of time. Barney and Pomp were given special commissions to execute.

Frank himself found it necessary to put his business affairs in proper shape for such an extended leave of absence. So he plunged into it with all possible haste.

The Octopus, as she lay in the big basin, was a creation to be viewed with much admiration and wonderment.

From time immemorial the problem of submarine navigation had been the hobby of inventors and ship-builders. But up to date nothing had been devised of a practical kind until Frank Reade, Jr., mastered the difficulty.

Then, after the invention was perfected, as is generally the case, everybody wondered at its simplicity and why they had not seen the patent themselves. But everybody could not hope to become a great inventor like Frank Reade, Jr.

The Octopus was modeled, so far as her hull went, somewhat after the pattern of a Mississippi flatboat or steamer, such as are used on shallow rivers.

She was broad of beam and flat bottomed, with very little keel. Yet she was well balanced and steady and capable of making a heavy sea, as is the case with vessels of the monitor type.

Her freeboard was necessarily low, and her deck of steel so constructed that it could stand powerful pressure. A guard rail protected it on all sides.

Forward, rising from the deck in a conical form, was the pilot house with its heavy, plate-glass windows. Just aft of this a dome-like structure of steel arose, with windows of heavy glass, protected with steel netting. There was a water-tight door and a vestibule in the side of this structure which served as the main cabin.

Three steel masts were intended to balance the craft more than for practical use. A powerful search-light was located forward.

The cabin of the Octopus was richly furnished, and contained all the necessary compartments and conveniences for the comforts of the crew.

There were state-rooms for all. A cooking galley and storage-rooms. The motive power of the vessel was electricity, and under the pilot house were the electric engines.

In the pilot house was the key-board for the operation of the engines and the wheel. Here also was the chemical generator which disseminated pure air to all parts of the boat while under water, by means of tubes and valves.

Amidships and in the deep hold was the tank by means of which water was taken in to sink the boat or expelled by pneumatic pressure to raise it. All the mechanical parts of the Octopus were ingenious and perfect.

It proved that a master-mind had conceived and carried forward this wonderful invention. It would be hard indeed to equal it.

Barney and Pomp soon had stores of all kinds on board the Octopus. In a few days all was in readiness for the start.

Count Potolski came down from New York all equipped and ready for the voyage. His valet he had sent home by steamer.

Frank welcomed him warmly and they went at once on board the Octopus. All was ready for the start.

Of course the news of the project had spread far and wide and a great throng was in attendance to see the voyagers off.

When the gates were opened the Octopus glided out into the canal and thence into the river. A general ovation was given the party.

But Frank took the wheel, and the Octopus shot away down the river. Readestown soon faded from sight.

In due time they were out to sea and leaving the shores of America behind.

Frank did not intend to stop anywhere until they should reach the Azores. Thence he intended to sail for Gibraltar and the Mediterranean.

Out to sea in the heaving rollers of the Atlantic, the Octopus proved herself a good, staunch vessel. To be sure, her low freeboard allowed a high wave to once in a while wash over her completely.

But her decks being smooth and clear, no harm was done. The voyagers kept well in the cabin and pilot house most of the time.

On sped the Octopus. Vessels were sighted and sometimes hailed. The little vessel attracted much attention.

The days passed.

At night the search-light showed the way plainly enough. Except in a fog, there was slight danger of collision.

The great ocean liners loomed up as literal giants beside the Octopus. She could easily evade them in a good light.

But one night closed in with a fearful dense fog. Frank was not a little alarmed, and even thought seriously of sending the Octopus below the surface to travel under water, where there would be little danger.

But yet he kept her on the surface. As midnight came, the searchlight was hardly able to penetrate fifty yards ahead of the vessel.

This distance would never have allowed of the dodging an oncoming vessel. Of course no other vessel might be within hundreds of miles.

But there was always the deadly chance of a collision. Again and again Frank put his hand on the electric button to send the vessel down, but each time hesitated.

To be sure progress under water would not be so fast but it would be safer, which was argument enough.

Suddenly Burnoy, who was on the forward deck with a night-glass, gave a great cry of alarm.

"What is it, Barney?" asked Frank, as he sprung to the door.

"Shuro, sor, it's another vessel."

"Where away?"

"Right alongside, sor!"

Frank stared into the fog. For a moment all was obscure.

Then he saw plainly the outlines of a brig. She was standing up well, but going slow as there was of course little air to move her. What there was lifted the fog so that she could be seen only momentarily.

Every sail was set and she was running alongside the almost stationary Octopus. In fact, their speed at the moment was about the same.

She was distant about fifty yards. It was a curious situation and Frank was for a moment alarmed.

As no hail had come from her, it would seem that her crew knew nothing of the nearness of the submarine boat. The peril lay in the fact that she might at any moment change her course.

Frank knew no longer. Making a trumpet with his hands, he shouted:

"Brig ahoy!"

There was a sudden murmur of distant voices, the sound of a creaking wheel and groaning blocks, and then an answer came back:

"Ahoy!"

"Keep a straight course or you will be into us! Do you see us?"

"By ther salt herrings!" exclaimed a voice on the brig's deck, "there's a small steamer off our port side! Ahoy, stranger! What vessel is yours?"

"The submarine boat, Octopus, bound for Gibraltar and the Mediterranean. What ship is yours?"

"The Hester May, of Gloucester, bound for Fayal!"

"Pretty heavy fog!"

"Yes. We are keeping all the lookout we can. We don't fear vessels of our own kind; but those ocean greybounds are our deadly enemies."

"You are right. I hope you will not encounter one."

"Thanks to ye, skipper. I'll bear a bit more to windward to get free from you. Best respects, sir!"

"Au revoir!" replied Frank.

The schooner sank into the fog. Then a fearful sound burst upon the hearing of all.

It was like a hoarse bray from the depths of Hades. A strange, unearthly call from the gloom comprehensive to all. The fog whistle of a steamer.

Barney and Frank leaned far out to see the lights of the leviathan if possible. For an instant it seemed as if they were in her path.

Then there followed an awful sickening crash. A hoarse smothered chorus of many voices and the rush of falling waters.

"My soul!" cried Frank; "they have struck the brig!"

"Mither av Moses!" gasped Barney; "it's all up wid thim!"

"Heaven help them!" cried the count, who had come out on deck; "they are doomed to an awful death!"

A faint glow of light for a moment showed in the fog. There was a grating sound, the swirling of waters and all was still.

Then a distant gong sounded.

"They know they have run something down!" cried Frank; "they are coming to a stop."

"Little help they will be able to give the poor souls by the time they get here," said Potolski.

Frank was pale, but very determined.

"It behooves us to save whom we can," he cried. "Bear the Octopus off to starboard, Barney. Some of them may be in the water."

"All roight, sor!"

Then Frank and the count raised their voices, shouting to any possible survivors of the ill-fated brig, and their cries were soon answered.

For there were survivors. Hoarse cries for help were heard.

A moment later the submarine boat came upon wreckage to which were clinging three men. They were quickly drawn aboard the Octopus.

One of them was an old gray-bearded skipper, and the other two of the ordinary seamen type. They were bedraggled and much exhausted.

Pomp hastened into the cabin, where he gave them whiskey as a restorative. The Octopus cruised about for some while looking for other survivors.

But there were none. Three alone of the brig's crew had survived.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE BLACK SEA.

WHEN Frank and Count Potolski entered the cabin, the skipper and his companions had revived sufficiently to be able to talk.

They began at once to bemoan the loss of their vessel and the rest of the crew.

"All gone!" wailed the aged skipper; "the Hester May and twelve good men gone to Davy Jones!"

"Then there were fifteen in your crew?" asked Frank.

"Ay, mate!" replied the skipper.

"Don't despair. There may be other survivors. Perhaps the steamer picked up some."

But the skipper shook his head.

"Don't ye believe it, mate. She never does that. The brig went down too quick. To be sure we are insured, but I can never replace the Hester May!"

"Then you ewned ber?"

"Ay, mate, she was the apple of my eye. Asking your pardon, sir. I am Ben Bunce, captain of the lost brig, sir. Gloucester is my home."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Bunce, but not under such circumstances. I trust you may recon your loss."

"I thank 'ee, sir. These are two of my mates. Lee Jones and Jim Olson. I reckon we're thrown upon ye, skipper. What is your port?"

"Any port in the Azores."

"Ah, Terceira would do me. I have a good friend there——"

"We will put in at Terceira, sir, or do anything else to help you. I hope you will keep up good spirits."

"Thank 'ee, sir!"

Frank and Potolski went out again on deck. As they did so, a bell clanged in the fog near at hand, and a stentorian voice shouted:

"Ahoy! Are there any survivors?"

"Ahoy the steamer," replied Frank.

"Ahoy! What craft are you?"

"The submarine boat Octopus, bound for Gibraltar. What steamer are you?"

"The Iron City of New York. We are westward bound, and struck some sort of sailing vessel in the fog."

"Aye, aye," replied Frank. "We have three of the survivors already aboard."

"Oh, ye have?" came eagerly.

"Yes, the rest are probably drowned, and the brig is at the bottom of the sea."

"A terrible pity! Lay to easy and we'll send a boat aboard."

"Aye, aye!"

"I must say they are more humane than the majority of steamer people," declared Count Potolski, "they will no doubt offer succor to the unfortunate men!"

"I have no doubt," replied Frank. "As they are homeward bound perhaps Captain Bunce will prefer to go with them."

Frank went down into the cabin and communicated the facts to the rescued men. Of course they at once embraced the opportunity to return direct to New York.

In a few moments the Iron City's boat was alongside and two of her officers with a surgeon sprung aboard. He quickly dressed the few cuts the seamen had received, and then Captain Warden, for he was one of the officers, said:

"Of course I regret the affair as much as anybody, but such accidents are unavoidable."

"Until such time as you steamer captains will desist from running at full speed in a fog," said Potolski.

Captain Warden flushed.

"We have our orders," he said.

"Well, they are inhuman orders," said the count, vigorously; "in this case they have cost a dozen lives and a fine brig."

The captain shrugged his shoulders.

"We will do all in our power to atone for the mishap," he said.

"Will you gentlemen care to return to New York with us?"

It was finally decided by the survivors of the wreck that they would do this. So they thanked Frank and his companions and went aboard the steamer.

The steamer dropped away into the fog and went on her course. Once more the Octopus was alone in the dense gloom.

Frank shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Ugh! I am glad that leviathan did not strike us. Let us go into the cabin and travel under water until this fog lifts. Are you agreeable?"

"Indeed I am," agreed the count, "this risk is certainly very great. The fog should lift in ten or twelve hours."

"Exactly, and then we can return to the surface."

So Frank pressed a button which hermetically sealed all the doors and windows; then he opened the tank, and the Octopus at once plunged beneath the surface.

Frank descended a hundred feet which did not reveal the bottom of the sea. Indeed, at this point it might have been half a mile deep.

The Octopus kept on her underwater course for some hours. When she finally came to the surface again the sea was clear of fog, and the sun was shining brightly.

Not a sail was in sight anywhere; increase of speed now became possible.

No other incident worthy of record occurred until the Octopus reached the Azores. Here a brief stop was made at Terceira to take on water and a few supplies.

The people of the little Portuguese town crowded down to the water-side to get a look at the Yankee invention. It was an object of much wonderment to them.

But the Octopus did not remain long at Terceira. Soon she was on her way to Gibraltar.

In due time she passed through the famous straits and entered the Mediterranean Sea. The stormiest and roughest part of the journey had been made.

Taking all things into consideration, thus far the Octopus had made a very fast trip for a vessel of her size. Barely two weeks had elapsed since leaving New York.

In the Mediterranean new scenes and types of vessels were encountered. Count Potolski sat on deck and enjoyed the scene intensely.

Along the coast of Algiers the submarine boat proceeded until the Island of Sicily showed one morning on her port bow. No stop was made here, though they sailed near enough to the island to hail any one on shore.

There was now a long run across a wide stretch of sea to the southern capes of Greece. Then the Octopus entered the great Archipelago.

Winding her way among these beautiful isles, so famed in story and history, she approached the mouth of the Dardanelles.

This long and narrow strait, leading into the Sea of Marmora, is the gateway to Constantinople and the domains of the Sultan of Turkey.

Warships are not permitted to pass the Dardanelles and for a time the Octopus was regarded with suspicion as she resembled an American monitor very strongly. But finally Count Potolski secured the necessary permission and the submarine boat entered the famous strait.

On either side great guns frowned upon the passing ships. At a word from the commandants of the Turkish forts no vessel could have lived in that narrow pass.

To be sure the Octopus could have bidden defiance to the Turks and made a submarine passage of the Dardanelles. But such a move would have angered the Turkish government and been coupled with some risk as torpedoes were placed everywhere in the straits.

So Frank decided that it would be much safer to obtain permission and it proved that he was right. Twice in the Sea of Marmora he was obliged to lay to while captains of Turkish gunboats boarded the Octopus.

But they suffered the voyagers to pass unmolested when confronted with the Sultan's signature. And now they drew near Constantinople and the Bosphorus, the channel leading into the Black Sea.

This was the last difficult point to pass.

After much trouble and red tape by the Turkish authorities, the voyagers finally made the necessary passage of the Bosphorus, and at last entered the Black Sea.

Count Potolski was delighted.

"The last obstacle is overcome!" he cried. "Success now waits upon us."

"I hope so!" said Frank.

"I know it. We have only the cataracts of the Dneiper to pass, and I know a channel by which that can be done!"

All speed was put on, and soon they were far out into the Black Sea. Strange looking vessels were encountered.

Most of these were of an outlandish and ancient type, unlike those of the Mediterranean. Picturesque they were indeed, but Barney remarked:

"Share, there's nothing loike a good American steamer afther all. I'd oiver risk me loife f' thim hurdy-grudy's, yez kin bet."

"Golly! I don't blame yo' honey!" agreed Pomp; "dey am wuss dan a gnm cauce. Suah nuff, gemmens!"

Potolski laughed at this.

"There is hardly such progress in this part of the world as in free America," he said. "In your land no despot has his foot upon your necks!"

"Bejabers, plwy don't the people rise ap an' foight fer their liberty?" asked Barney.

"The same question might apply to your native isle," said the count. "Why don't you rise up and throw off the English yoke?"

"Bejabers, we can't!"

"Just so! And that is whnt is the troable with these poor wretches. The first poor devil who dares to incite an uprising, is instantly seized and empaled on a stake or flayed alive. Some horrible example kills the courage of the others."

"Howly murder!" shivered Barney, "I don't wondher thln that the Sultan has to have a bodyguard go wid him iverywhere. Bad cess to the whole ar' thim. There's no land loike free Ameriky!"

"You are right," agreed Potolski, "and if I can recover from the Black Lagoon the treasures of Makhova, the home-town of my ancestors, I shall retire to America and found a colony of my countrymen. Under your flag they can enjoy liberties and blessings, such as no other country on earth knows!"

"America has open arms for the unfortunate and the oppressed," said Frank.

"That is true," agreed the count, "and it is a merciful thing that such a harbor of refuge exists on earth. Heigho! What is that out yonder?"

All eyes were turned in the direction indicated, and all saw a peculiar looking sloop which was cutting across their course.

She carried the Russian flag and at her open ports the muzzles of guns could be seen.

"A Russian corvette!" exclaimed the count, in something like dismay. "Oh, do not let them board us! The Russian officials are harder to deal with than those of Turkey. It is hard indeed to explain matters to them."

Frank at once sprung to the wheel. He pressed on all speed and the Octopus fairly flew through the water. But the corvette was also a fast boat.

Suddenly a flash of smoke and flame came from her side and a shot hissed across the Octopus' bow.

CHAPTER IV.

OUTWITTING THE RUSSIANS.

It was very evident that the Russians meant business. This summons to heave to was a peremptory one.

Frank frowned, and said:

"Such things are permitted only in time of war. Can't they see that we fly the American flag, and are at peace with their nation?"

"The Russian strikes first and explains afterward," declared Potolski. "The unfortunate thing is that we are within range of their guns."

"What!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement; "do you think they would dare to sink us?"

"Certainly, if you do not heed their request."

"The scoundrels!" exclaimed Frank, angrily; "they have no right to interfere with us anyway."

"That may be, but they don't think as you do. Keep your eyes open; don't let them board us."

"But what shall I do?" exclaimed the young inventor. "If I heave to they will board us. If I keep on they will open fire and sink us."

For a moment only the young inventor hesitated.

Then he reversed the electric engines and brought the boat slowly about. Potolski looked aghast and Barney cried:

"Shure, Misther Frank, will yez surreader to thim?"

"Not a bit!" replied Frank.

"But—" began Potolski.

"Have no fear!" said the young inventor. "I know what I am doing. I think I can handle these people all right."

Pomp came to the cabin door with open mouth watching the course of events. But nothing more was said.

The Russian vessel came up rapidly. When within hailing distance the call came in the Russian tongue:

"What craft are you?"

"I will answer," said Potolski, who of course knew the Russian tongue. "Give me the words, Mr. Reader."

"The Octopus, submarine boat from the U. S. of America!" answered Potolski.

"Where are you bound?"

"We are cruising for pleasure in the Black Sea," was Potolski's reply, which was literally correct.

"Lower your gangway for we shall board you and examine your papers," was the insolent reply; "if you are not what you claim, the Russian government holds you under arrest."

"You will board us at your peril!" replied Frank through Potolski. "We refuse to allow such an outrage. We are under the protection of the U. S. flag and it is respected by all nations with which it is at peace!"

A jeering laugh came back.

"You are a good ways from the United States," was the reply; "Russia protects its own waters and claims the right to investigate and if necessary to confiscate any suspicious craft."

"For the love of Heaven do not let them come aboard," pleaded Potolski.

"Trust me for that," said Frank, grimly.

"What will you do?"

"Keep your eyes open," then he repeated to the interpreter:

"We positively refuse to allow you to board us. You will interfere with us further at your peril!"

"Then we will blow you out of the water!" declared the Russian officer. "You shall have four minutes in which to lower your gangway."

"Enough!" said Frank to his companions. "These rascals are too thick-headed to understand international law, and it is useless to attempt to fight them, for we have no guns. Our only method, therefore, is to outwit them. Into the cabin, all of you!"

The command was instantly obeyed.

Frank saw that the Russian gunners had their pieces trained. It was evident that they were in earnest. There was no time to lose.

The Russian officer stood on the bridge with his watch in his hand. Frank made answer:

"In four minutes I will give you my answer."

Then he went into the pilot house. There was a smile upon his face, and he pressed an electric button on the keyboard.

Instantly every door and window was hermetically sealed. Potolski, who stood near, understood the move.

"Ah! I had forgotten," he said. "You will give them the slip by going down!"

"Yes!"

The next moment the Octopus gave a sudden plunge and went down like a bag of shot. The Russians sprang to the rail of their vessel in amazement.

The sudden sinking of the vessel was to them a startling thing. They did not understand that it was a submarine boat. They believed that the Octopus had suddenly broken herself in some way, or had split so that she had instantly gone down to rise no more.

Consequently they sailed away, satisfied that they had rid themselves of a deadly foe.

The Octopus went to the bottom and there rested upon a bed of white sand. All about were strange submarine growths and formations. To Potolski it was a new and wonderful scene.

The electric lights lit up the vicinity. Myriads of fish came swimming past the plate glass windows and great, waving plants hung over the deck.

The count hung at the observation window taking in the scene with interest.

"Ah!" he exclaimed; "this easily solves the problem of getting at the depths of the Black Lagoon. I am sure to recover the treasures of my ancestors. Ah, what is that?"

He gave a great start and stared at a distant huge object some yards away. Its outlines were those of a large sunken vessel.

"A sunken ship, sir," declared Barney; "there's many in the say."

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed the count; "doubtless some poor souls went down with it."

"Yis, sir."

"What can have been the story of its loss? Ah, the sea holds many a tragedy, many a sorrow. She looks as if many years had passed since she sailed on the surface."

Frank turned the search-light upon her.

"She is an old timer," he said; "to all appearances she has been under water fifty years or more. She is a type of the ancient Turkish galley."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Potolski; "perhaps some of my own countrymen, made slaves by the Turks, have worked at those long oars. I cannot help a shiver."

"Yes," cried Frank, "the poor slaves perished with the galley. Doubtless it was in a sea fight. You can see their skeletons in the galley now!"

This was true. A long line of white skeletons extended along the rotten galley in which they had sat while plying the oars. It was a sickening spectacle.

"Enough for me," said Potolski, turning away. "I am glad that the days of barbarism are passing."

"Yet it was you Poles, in the old days of Polish freedom, who fought the barbarous Cossacks and Tartars in the Ukraine, until they were half exterminated," said Frank.

"That is true. The fame of our Polish hussars, men of blood and iron, yet clings to our nation," agreed Potolski, "but the old spirit is dead. The Pole of to-day is not a warrior!"

Some hours passed ere Frank ventured to return to the surface with the Octopus.

Then, to the relief of all, it was seen that the sea was clear of all craft. The Russians were gone.

Once more the Octopus struck out across the Black Sea for the mouth of the Dnieper. A straight course was kept until one day a distant point of land was sighted.

"There it is!" cried Potolski; "that is the Peninsula of Tendra. To the east is the Gulf of Perekop. We must round that cape and shall there enter a basin into which flow conjointly the waters of the Dnieper and the river Bug. To the southwest the Dniester empties itself, and a little further south are the mouths of the Danube."

"The Black Sea receives the waters of the largest rivers in Europe," said Frank.

"Do not forget the Volga which empties into the Caspian Sea. That is the largest of all."

"But the river Don——"

"It is true that the Black Sea receives the Don. On the whole most of the streams of southern Europe empty into the Black Sea. But can you explain why the Caspian Sea, with no outlet can receive so many rivers?"

"It is strange indeed," agreed Frank. "There are some things in nature which baffle explanation."

"That is very true!"

"Yet may it not be possible that there is an underground outlet to the Caspian Sea, by means of which its waters flow into the Black Sea?"

Potolski shook his head.

"Impossible!" he said.

"Why?"

"A very strong reason. The waters of the Caspian Sea are eighty-six feet below those of the Black Sea."

"That settles it!" exclaimed Frank; "if there is a subterranean outlet, it must be in some other direction."

Rapidly now the submarine boat approached the peninsula of Tendra. Far to the west on the coast the spires of a city were seen.

"Odessa!" declared Potolski. "An old and historic town. Every foot of the region about is associated with ancient history. Many battles have been fought within a radius of a few hundred miles."

"Not the least of which were the battles of the Crimea!"

"You are right."

The submarine boat speedily rounded the peninsula and entered the placid basin into which the Dnieper emptied. Soon the mouth of the great river was seen far to the north.

Before darkness came the Octopus entered the river and began to

stem its strong current. When night did shut down they were far from the Black Sea.

They passed the important town of Kherson and soon made Berislov. For several days they pushed against the current and finally reached the cataracts.

Wild scenery the voyagers had never seen. The passes through which ran the mad cataracts were high and frowning. The thunder of the waters shook the earth.

Many a strong-hearted man might have been pardoned a sense of fear of those raging waters. But Potolski soon found the channel by which they were passable.

After much effort the Octopus passed up the rapids and soon was again in smooth water. The balance of the trip was soon over.

The mouth of the lagoon was soon reached. The Octopus passed between high banks of earth and stone and sailed into the great dark expanse. The Black Lagoon was rightly named.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE BLACK LAGOON.

It was indeed a Black Lagoon of the blackest kind. The water, in its stillness, seemed almost stagnant.

Barney let down a line, and found that the bottom was far away.

"Bejabers!" he cried, "there's a lot a' water in this place, to be shore!"

"You are right!" declared the count. "I doubt if it is anywhere less than one hundred feet."

The lagoon was of great extent. Indeed, it was a small inland sea.

But its waters were dark, and the heavy forests which bordered its edges grew to the water's edge and added to its appearance of gloominess.

It would have required no great stretch of imagination for a superstitious mind to have seen on a dark night legions of ghosts and grisly forms—the visions of those who had perished in such dreadful fashion two hundred years ago.

The count was very deeply impressed. He walked the deck of the Octopus in a nervous, excited manner. The scene and the hour recalled to him many legends of the past.

Beneath him, under those dark waters, were the bones of thousands of his ancestors. There was buried the wealth of a great city, only waiting his hand now to be recovered.

Already he saw himself the possessor of a great fortune, the magnate of a new and happy community in the new world of America. He could hardly contain himself at that moment.

Frank Reade, Jr., read his mind like a printed book.

So far as recovered treasure was concerned, the young inventor had no interest.

He was wealthy himself, and with the submarine boat might have explored the seas for treasure at any time. He had no use for more fortune than he now possessed. So the gold held no allurements for him.

He was alone interested in the exploration and location of the sunken city. Moreover, it was a pleasure to him to be able to assist Potolski.

"In what part of the lagoon do you reckon we will find the city?" he asked of the count.

The latter consulted a map.

"As near as I can reckon from this," he said, "it must have been located just under the brow of yonder high cliff, but I am not sure."

"You think the whole valley was inhabited then?"

"Oh, certainly! It was a very productive and populous region. At least thirty thousand people must have perished in that awful flood!"

"Dreadful!" exclaimed Frank. "Well, here we are at last in the Black Lagoon! Why not begin work at once?"

"I am most anxious."

"Very well."

Frank gave the word and the deck was cleared. Then the doors and windows were hermetically sealed, and the Octopus sank into the depths of the lagoon.

Down she settled rapidly.

Frank looked at the indicator.

"Two hundred feet," he said.

"Bottom," cried Barney.

"Is it clear?" asked Frank.

"Yis, sir!"

"Let her rest then!"

The Octopus settled down upon the bottom. Frank went to the search-light and sent its rays in all directions.

Suddenly the count gave a great cry.

"There!" he shouted, "do you see it? Is not that a wall of stone?"

"A parapet!" said Frank, "and a gateway. The wooden gate has rotted away!"

"The entrance to the city?"

"We shall soon see!"

The Octopus was now sent a bit nearer the wall. But it at once became evident that it was not the city beyond it.

Instead it was a house or small castle of rock, with parapets, keep and even the remains of a moat and bridge.

"The residence of some lord!" declared the count. "See? there were once fine gardens here. And it was all arranged with an eye to defense!"

"Very true!" agreed Frank, "shall we explore the place?"

The count hesitated.

"Doubtless there is treasure there," he said, "but I think we will do as well to push on and reach the city. There we shall find the treasury, where there will be enough for all!"

"Very well!" agreed Frank.

The Octopus began now to make its way slowly along the bottom. It was not long before the traces of a highway were found.

And then the ruins of other houses of various types. For an hour the submarine boat groped on thus.

Then suddenly Barney cried:

"Shure, sor, I kin see the city. Will yer look yonder?"

The count fell upon his knees and clasped his hands.

"That is true enough," he cried. "It is the kindness of Heaven!"

The scene was an interesting one. The high walls and bastions of a fortified city were plainly visible. There was a great tower and a gate and the Octopus made its way to this.

A moment more and the boat sailed into the street of the city. The scene baffled description.

Though acently two hundred years have passed, the skeletons of the victims lay in heaps in the broad streets of the city. They were in the positions in which the unfortunates had fallen when overtaken by the awful deluge of death.

The buildings were covered with silt and aquatic growth, and in some places had yielded to the influence of the water. But they were yet in a remarkable state of preservation.

The long rows of antique houses were broken finally into a wide square, and here were the public buildings of the city.

Here was the government house, the palace of the governor, and the other buildings of a public character. Somewhere among them was the treasury and the banks of the town.

Of course the only way to unearth this was to attempt careful exploration. The count was eager to begin.

So the submarine boat was allowed to rest on the bottom, or the paving of the thoroughfare. Then Frank made preparations for leaving the cabin.

He brought up a couple of diving suits of his own invention. These required neither life line nor air pump.

The best of air was furnished the helmet by means of a chemical generator carried on the diver's back. This enabled the diver to remain under water an indefinite period at almost any depth.

"We will put on these," he said to the count, "they will enable us to visit the buildings."

"Good!" cried the Pole, eagerly. "Oh, Mr. Reade, you are a wonderful man to have perfected such an invention."

"Pshaw!" said Frank; "it was a simple matter."

They speedily donned the helmets, and then Frank gave his directions to Barney and Pomp.

Then he stepped into the vestibule, leading to the deck, followed by the count. Closing the cabin door hermetically, Frank turned a valve which flooded the vestibule with water.

Then opening the outer door the divers walked boldly out on deck.

For a moment the count who was unused to such an experience was giddy and weak. But after some moments he grew accustomed to the pressure.

It was not possible to travel very fast under water. But they made their way slowly across the square.

Barney kept the search-light upon them until they ascended the stone steps and entered one of the public buildings.

There was upon each helmet a small electric light, by means of which the diver could see his way when in a dark place. Frank led the way into the building.

The scene was a ghastly one.

Evidently the flood had swept down while the city council was holding a meeting.

There were great benches of stone and the remains of a rostrum. Whittened skeletons were scattered everywhere.

It was a scene of fearful desolation and death. Little was left but the crumbling bones. Here and there the rusted particles of a flintlock gun or a sword were the only tangible objects existing.

About the council chamber the two divers roamed. A few coins of gold were found among the skeletons, doubtless once pocket pieces of living owners.

No record of any sort was to be found, save a metal tablet set in the wall over the speaker's desk, and which bore the arms of Poland and an inscription in Latin.

Yet at the time of the bursting of the flood, there must have been heaps of parchment and books piled on these benches with records of the Commonwealth and the city. But these had all become a thing of the past.

But the council chamber was soon explored. Then they entered a large hall with rows of shelves which must have once held the archives and books of the government. All had perished in the rack of time.

Only moldering heaps of blackish substance were left. The action of the water had rotted the paper long since.

Wherever a door was encountered the oaken wood had fallen from the rusted hinges. A gentle push or kick was sufficient to displace it.

From one room to another the explorers wandered. Then they came to the sacred chapel where once the city fathers had knelt in prayer.

The iron crucifix and pulpit were yet standing though half consumed with rust. But the gray arches of the nave were hung with filth, and the floor knee deep in silt.

It had been more than two hundred years since service was held in

that house of prayer. It was safe to say that it never would know such a thing again.

But the divers now passed into the next building.

This was undoubtedly the city armory. There were stands of arms and rusted cannon of an antique pattern, but the owners were dust long since.

Then they crept through a court-yard and entered yet another public building. The doors of this were of steel.

But they were so rusted that a hole was easily battered in them, and the divers crept through.

They were in the entrance to deep stone vaults. On either side were doors of steel leading into chambers arched with stone.

Count Potolski could not restrain himself, and placing his helmet close to Frank's, he shouted:

"These are the treasure vaults without doubt. Now, we shall see their contents. At last, at last!"

With which Potolski pushed his way into the nearest chamber.

CHAPTER VI.

RECOVERING THE TREASURE.

The spectacle which met the count's gaze was a disappointing one. There were no chests of treasure nor heaps of gold coin. Only a mass of rubbish, that was all.

Potolski stooped and examined this. As near as he could judge, the rubbish had once been paper and the remains of wooden shelves.

Then he guessed the truth. This vault had undoubtedly been used as a storage place for valuable government archives.

Satisfied of this he turned, and with Frank entered the next chamber. This was long and narrow. Against the wall were stone basins arranged at intervals.

In these were what had once been bags of some tough material. This had rotted, and falling apart, the contents lay in the basins.

Yellow shining gold coins, ducats and roubles of Russia and Poland. Mighty was the treasure thus revealed.

Potolski picked up some of the coins and examined them. They were but lightly tarnished. Gold is the one metal upon which water has but slight action.

"At last—at last," he muttered, "it is my rightful own, for it belonged to my ancestors. It will buy me a dukedom, but it shall be in fair America."

Frank now put his helmet against Potolski's and shouted:

"Now that we have found the gold, the next thing is to get it aboard the Octopus."

"You are right," replied Potolski; "let us lose no time."

"We will take what we can, and then I will get Barney to assist us in getting the balance."

"All right!"

Each had provided himself with a leathern bag before leaving the Octopus. These they now proceeded to fill with the gold coins.

In a short while they were on their way back to the submarine boat. The Celt was on the lookout for them with the electric light.

Clambering over the rail, they entered the vestibule. Frank pressed a lever which expelled the water in the vestibule by pneumatic pressure.

Then they entered the cabin. Barney and Pomp were astonished at sight of the gold.

"Howly Mither!" gasped the Celt, "that is the reale stuff, to be shure. Is there any more ov it?"

"Thousands!" replied Potolski, exuberantly. "Enough to make us all millionaires."

"Yez don't say!"

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "I jes' sink we bettah get de res' ob it!"

"We shall!" declared the count; "but I want your help!"

"Barney and Pomp, you can put on diving-suits and go with the count," said Frank; "bring away what you can of the coin!"

The plan delighted the two jokers, and they hurried away to get diving-suits. In a short while they were ready.

Then began the work of transporting the treasure to the Octopus. It was no slight task.

Many were the trips made by Barney and Pomp. As fast as the gold was brought on board the Octopus it was placed in one of the staterooms, which became a literal treasure chamber.

After many hours of work all of the gold coin was brought from the treasure vault. Frank estimated that its value was nearly one million dollars.

No doubt other treasure existed in various parts of the buried city. But the count was satisfied.

"I have enough," he said; "if I ever need more I can return for it. I am happy. Let us leave the Black Lagoon."

"First let us do a bit more of exploring," said Frank. "We will take a little submarine cruise about it. I have some curiosity."

"Oh, certainly," agreed the count. "I shall enjoy that myself."

Accordingly the Octopus was raised a short distance from the bottom and began to sail over the sunken city. Many strange scenes were revealed.

Leaving the sunken city, the Octopus passed over buried houses, estates and the beds of streams. Everywhere were to be seen marks of the flood. Skeletons were on all sides, where the luckless victims had been overtaken.

It was a sickening spectacle. Yet Frank went to the farther end of the submerged valley. Then he pressed a button and the submarine boat rose to the surface.

It was just coming on dark and the Black Lagoon presented a per-

fectly smooth expanse, looking indeed like a great black mirror set in the landscape.

The Octopus anchored in the shadow of the lagoon shore, and it was decided to wait until the next day before emerging into the Dneiper.

There seemed nothing left now but to return as quickly as possible to the United States with the gold.

There the count could convert it into greenbacks and undertake his colonization scheme with a certainty of success.

The night passed rapidly. The voyagers were much wearied and slept soundly until after sunrise.

Frank was the first astir, and he went on deck to enjoy the glorious sunlight. He paced the deck for awhile, until suddenly by chance he had occasion to glance toward the narrow cut leading to the current of the Dneiper.

He gave a start and stared for a moment somewhat in surprise at an object which there caught his gaze.

It was a blazing red object moving among the rocks. Soon other objects were to be descried.

Frank opened his glass and studied them for a moment.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "they are soldiers!"

This was true.

A body of soldiers were in the cut and engaged in some sort of work. Suddenly Frank was electrified to see a small launch sail through the cut.

Its decks were alive with soldiers. The Russian flag was visible. They were no doubt the Czar's troops.

Frank stepped to the companionway and shouted:

"Hello, Potolski! Come up here, quick!"

"Eh?" exclaimed the count, as he sprang on deck. "What is the matter?"

"Look yonder? What do you make of that?"

The count rubbed his eyes and looked again and again. His usually dark face was fairly livid.

"Sacre!" he exclaimed in French, "it is the devils of the Czar! What are they doing here?"

"What?" asked Frank in return.

"Perdition! do you think they are after us?"

"It looks bad."

Together they watched the launch. Suddenly it came steaming toward them.

It carried no cannon fortunately, but the soldiers, of course, were well armed. Frank started the Octopus slowly on a circuit of the lagoon.

"They are after us," declared Potolski; "don't allow them to get too near."

"They must have heard of our mission here."

"Exactly."

"Doubtless the authorities wish to prevent our removing the treasure."

"It does not belong to them," cried Potolski, indignantly; "it is mine by every right. The government has no right to interfere."

"No doubt they think they have," said Frank, "but we will disabuse their minds of that idea."

"Indeed we will!"

The launch came sidling up toward the submarine boat. Frank drew into the pilot-house, saying:

"It will be safer here than on deck."

"Yes, you are right," agreed Potolski. "Why not hail them?"

But at this moment a hail came from the deck of the launch. It was in the Russian tongue, so Potolski answered it.

"Aho, Americans! What do you in the Czar's private domain?"

"Is this the Czar's private domain?" asked Potolski.

"It is," was the reply. "All Russia belongs to the Czar."

"But the Czar's subjects have a right to their own landed property."

"Are you a subject of the Czar?"

"I am."

"But you fly the Yankee flag."

"These are friends of mine," replied Potolski; "they are here by my courtesy."

"Very fine," was the sneering reply. "But who are you?"

"I am Count Ivan Potolski, descendant of the Potolskis of Makhuova, the submerged," replied the count, proudly; "this is my heritage, and you are trespassers under the law of Russian freeholders."

A mocking laugh came back.

"You claim that which cannot be proven yours," was the reply;

"the principedom or principality of Makhuova has been extinct these two hundred years, and the title has long since reverted to the crown. These are the domains of the Czar. We know by reliable information that you have come here to seek treasure which, if you have recovered it, you must turn over to the Czar!"

Potolski was pale but determined. He interpreted all to Frank, who frowned and said:

"It looks as if they meant to give us trouble. I am well aware of the fact that your Czar is a despot. Can you defend your claim?"

Potolski groaned.

"Not in a Russian court," he said; "the Czar would overrule any decision. It is true that Russia is ruled by a despot. This treasure by every right belongs to me."

"Of course, it does!"

"You will agree to that. Now what shall I do?"

"Hang onto it!"

"It is unfortunate that the Czar's soldiers learned of our mission here. It is past my comprehension how it leaked out!"

"It is not past mine," said Frank; "it is easy to understand that

some Russian dignitary, perhaps the Czar's own minister in Washington, read the account of our project in some one of our newspapers."

"Ah, that explains all beyond doubt!" cried the count. "Your American newspapers are so enterprising—they unearth everything."

Meanwhile the launch had been drawing nearer to the Octopus. One of the Russian officers again shouted:

"Lay to, and we will come aboard!"

"Not if I know it!" muttered Frank.

"What is your purpose?" asked Potolski.

"We must search you," replied the Russian; "if you have treasure aboard which you have recovered from these depths you must give it up!"

"We decline to allow you to come aboard!" replied Potolski.

"Ha, you do!" was the angry response. "So you defy the authority of the Czar? Know that for this, you accursed Pole, you shall die like a dog!"

CHAPTER VII.

RUNNING THE GANTLET.

FRANK saw at once that matters had reached a critical stage, but yet he had no idea of yielding.

It would be a fatal move. On the slightest pretext the submarine boat would be seized and appropriated by the Russians. The voyagers themselves might suffer, no one could tell what sort of a fate.

The young inventor saw at once that his only method was to hold out stubbornly and resolutely. If necessary he would fight.

It would seem as if the odds were greatly against the submarine voyagers, but Frank was undaunted.

Through Potolski he made reply:

"The American captain refuses to allow his craft to be boarded, and the Russian meddles at his peril!"

The Russian officer was angry. Extra speed was put on the launch, and the hail came back:

"Unless you lay to we shall open fire on you!"

"Tell them to fire away!" said Frank, grimly. "We don't care for that!"

The result was that the Russians at once opened fire with their rifles. Of course no harm was done.

The bullets rattled off the steel plates of the Octopus like water from a duck's back.

Frank closed the doors and windows hermetically and prepared for an emergency. His purpose was now to outrun the launch to the entrance of the lagoon.

The Octopus was the fastest saller, and rapidly outstripped the launch. But as they drew near the narrow strait, Barney suddenly cried:

"Howly Moses! we kin niver get through therel!"

"Why?" called Frank.

"Shure, sor, they've put some sort av a chain across it, sor!"

A glance showed that this was true. A few feet above the surface a huge chain had been stretched from bank to bank.

This was large enough and strong enough to hinder a much larger and heavier vessel than the Octopus. For a moment the situation looked dubious.

Then Frank stepped to the keyboard with a grim smile.

"We will fool them at that game," he said. "They forget that this is a submarine boat."

"Sure enough!" cried Potolski. "We ought to be able to go under that chain."

Frank opened the valve and down went the submarine boat. In a few moments it had passed completely under the chain and into the current of the Dneiper.

The astonishment of the Russians must certainly have been intense. Their prize had skillfully slipped away.

Down the river current, under water, the Octopus ran for a number of miles. When Frank sent her again to the surface, the launch was nowhere in sight.

"Well," said the young inventor, triumphantly, "we gave them the slip that time, didn't we?"

"You are right," said Potolski, whose face was very pale, "but we are not yet out of danger."

"Is that true?"

"Yes. You know we must pass towns on our way to the Black Sea. They will no doubt telegraph ahead, and they will meet us there with obstructions which, perhaps, we may not be able to surmount."

Frank shrugged his shoulders.

"We will make it lively for them," he said.

"Yet I think we had better go on with all haste," said Potolski.

"Yes. I agree with you," replied Frank seriously.

So the Octopus was forced ahead with all speed. Barney kept his place at the keyboard.

Down the Dneiper the Octopus flew.

In places the river was a broad and flowing stream. In other places the banks narrowed and the current was powerfully swift.

Again the banks widened, and marshes with silent lagoons became the order.

Little villages without number were passed. Sometimes boatmen on the river were overtaken.

In all cases they gazed upon the Octopus with sheer amazement. Whole settlements of Cossacks rushed down to the water's edge.

But in no case did they evince hostility. Thus far no evidence had

agreed that the Czar's orders to stop the boat had extended to this part of the river.

But soon they began to approach a small city.

"Is it Koislov?" said the count; "it has a telegraph line, and we may look for squalls here."

Indeed the moment the Octopus swung about the bend in the stream this was seen to be a fact.

Preparations had been made at Koislov to stop the invaders or interlopers, whatever they were.

Across the Dnieper a bridge of boats extended. These boats were filled with armed Cossacks.

As our voyagers noted that this seemed to be the only obstruction, they could not help a laugh.

"That will never stop us," said Frank. "It must be that their orders were not sufficiently explicit to make them understand that ours is a submarine boat."

"Just so," cried the count, with elation. "We shall fool them again. But we must look out for Brokislov below here."

A great din arose among the Cossacks as the submarine boat swung into view. Weapons were brandished and yells filled the air.

Frank kept straight on toward them with the Octopus. No doubt the Cossacks expected that the boat would strike directly into their line, and they were ready to board it.

But just before the Octopus reached the barrier, the Russians were astounded to see it sink into the river current and vanish altogether.

Down went the Octopus, and in a few moments it was at the bottom. For some distance Frank kept under the surface.

When at length satisfied that the danger point was passed, Frank came again to the surface.

The town was far behind them, and once more they went speeding down the river current, on their way to the Black Sea.

"Begorra!" cried Barney. "We fooled them quite enough that time."

"That is true," said Potolski, "but look out for Brokislov. They have a fort and cannon there!"

"Then you think they will lay for us at that point?" asked Frank.

"You may depend upon it," replied the count; "that is a military port."

"Well, perhaps we can pass the town without their knowing it."

But Potolski shook his head.

"Be sure they will have a barrier at the bottom of the river this time," he said. "We must look out for trouble."

All that day the Octopus, however, sailed on down the big river. They were rapidly drawing nearer the great cataracts. Once below these and they were comparatively safe.

For from there to the Black Sea there were so many lagoons, and the channel was so diversified that they could easily elude the sharpest foe.

Night came and Frank decided to proceed no further until the next day.

If he should attempt travel after dark, it would be necessary to use the search-light and might lead to an attack from the shore. The most Frank feared was a possible cannon shot.

If the hull of the Octopus should be perforated, even above the water line, her usefulness as a submarine boat would be past.

It was necessary therefore to be eternally vigilant.

There was no guessing what wooded height or promontory might hold a concealed fortress or battery. Barney was always on the watch.

The safest move was adopted. Frank selected a deep part of the river and sank the Octopus.

Then all retired to rest after the exciting events of the day. When the alarm gong announced daylight, all were again astir.

Once more the Octopus was on the surface. Again she shot down the river until suddenly the distant spires and domes of a town came into view.

"That is Brokislov," declared Potolski. "Now we must look out for the foe."

Frank took a long look at the distant town.

Then he examined the river banks and its surface carefully. The stream was very broad at this point.

He was half tempted to go beneath the surface and try to steal quietly by the town. But he reflected that there might be obstructions there as well as on the surface.

So he decided to keep straight on until he could see the territory ahead fully, and observe what sort of a scheme had been devised to stop him.

So the Octopus shot on, and suddenly rounding a bend in the stream all came to view.

A great cry escaped Potolski.

"Look!" he shouted. "What did I tell you? Every cannon on the fort is pointed toward us, and the river is filled with obstructions."

This was seen to be a fact.

Two chains of boats extended across the river. Soldiers patrolled the shore and were seen upon the fort.

A great yell went up when the Octopus shot into view. Frank took in every detail with lightning gaze.

"There is only one way!" he decided; "we must run by, as before, under water."

At that moment a great sheet of flame leaped from the fort. The roar of cannon followed.

But at that distance the iron shells fell short. Frank ran up the American flag and brought the Octopus to a halt.

She hovered in the river current a mile above the city. Here Frank had a shrewd purpose.

"When they see that I am not coming," he said, "they may come out here to parley. I want to learn, if I can, what the under-water obstructions are."

"Good!" cried Potolski; "that is a good plan!"

The cannons roared in a thunderous volume. The shells fell into the river doing no harm.

After awhile, however, the cannonade ceased, and then all was quiet in the distance. After some time a small launch was seen approaching.

Frank made sure that no cannon was aboard, before he allowed it to approach very near.

On board it were a number of men in uniform. That these were Russian authorities there was no doubt.

Frank stepped out on deck and awaited their approach.

CHAPTER VIII.

DOWN THE RIVER.

WHEN the launch was within speaking distance it came about. Then followed the hail:

"Boat ahoy! Who are you?"

Potolski answered:

"We are American travelers."

"That is false!"

"As you will," replied the Pole. "What right have you to detain us?"

"By order of the Czar!"

"Pshaw!" retorted the Pole; "by the order of your starosta, no higher official, or possibly the vaevadn of your State. We do not recognize such authority."

"You must do so or pay the penalty."

"Who are you?"

"Agents of the Czar!"

"What do you ask?"

"We demand that you surrender. We know that you have found treasure in the domains of the Czar. By our laws four-fifths goes to the crown."

"The treasure does not belong to the Czar," replied Potolski, firmly; "it is the heritage of Count Potolski of old Makhnova, and he has simply claimed his own."

"Deliver the treasure up and you shall have a hearing in the Royal Court."

"Ah, indeed!" retorted Potolski. "Perhaps you think I am foolish. What would such a hearing mean? Simply the confiscation of heritage by the Czar and my banishment to far Siberia. Better death than such a fate."

"Then you refuse?"

"I do."

"May your blood be on your head! The empaling stake shall be your fate!"

Potolski knew what this awful threat meant. To the Slav the threat of the empaling stake was horrible.

Pale as a ghost, he turned to Frank.

"My soul!" he exclaimed; "we are lost if we fall into their clutches. That must not be!"

"It shall not be!" said Frank, determinedly.

The launch had begun to drop down in the current. By Frank's request Potolski asked:

"How will you prevent our passing your forts?"

"Try it and see," was the retort. "You need not think to slip by under water this time with your devil's invention."

"We shall see."

"Know you that a line of torpedoes awaits you which will blow you into eternity?"

"And deprive you of the treasure."

"Even if you get beyond Brokislov you will find it impossible to get out of the Dnieper. Even the Sultan will be ready to stop you in the Bosphorus."

"Your threats do not terrify."

"Once again! Do you surrender?"

"Never!"

"Then curses upon you!"

The launch slipped back down the river. Once again the forts began firing. But no harm was done.

The voyagers went back into the cabin.

"Now," said Frank, as he drew a deep breath, "comes the tug of war."

He pressed the lever and the Octopus sank. Slowly she felt her way along the bottom.

The search-light traveled in all directions. Suddenly there was a dull shock, waters surged about the submarine boat, and she pitched heavily for a moment. Then all was over.

"What was that?" asked Potolski.

"They are dropping dynamite bombs into the water!" said Frank.

"What if one should hit us?"

"It would blow us into kingdom come!" declared Frank. "We must trust to luck to avoid them!"

It was a critical moment.

Slowly and cautiously the Octopus crept along the river bed. There was need of this.

At intervals the banks exploded all about the Octopus. Suddenly Frank gave a start.

He saw a network of wires just ahead. He knew that they were connected with the torpedoes.

"Bring me my divlug-suit, Barney," he said, grimly.

"All roight, sor!"

The Octopus rested on the bottom. Frank put on the suit, and a moment more was out on deck.

In their present position they were safe from the bombs, for the Slavs would not dare drop them in proximity to the torpedoes for fear of prematurely exploding them.

Frank was quickly out on deck. He carried with him a sharp pair of pincers. In less time than it takes to tell it he had cut the torpedo wires.

The Octopus slid safely under the torpedoes, and once more had a clear course before her.

As it became apparent that there were no more torpedoes to be dreaded, she increased her speed. A mile below the city she was again on the surface and speeding toward the great cataracts.

Potolski was jubilant.

Escape now seemed certain.

Below the cataracts there were numberless lagoons and deviations in the river's course. The boat could slip on down to the Black Sea in comparative safety.

While the Slavs were busily exploding bombs in the river and fancying the enemy entirely torn to pieces, the latter was putting miles between herself and the scene of excitement. Soon the river narrowed into a deep and mighty canyon.

The roar of the cataracts was plainly audible. The Octopus was now in a swift current.

There was no little risk in running these rapids. But Potolski knew the channel well and now took the wheel.

The Octopus with a lurch shot into the swift current. Down she went like a rocket.

Her buoyancy was largely in her favor. Several times she lightly touched a hidden reef, but each time she evaded it safely.

On aid on she went over the foaming waste. It was a critical time, for all depended upon her success in making the run.

But good luck was with our voyagers.

She shot down over the last fall and came into a great eddying whirlpool. Across this she raced.

Then the cliffs began to fade away, and soon she came into still water and an open country.

All drew a breath of relief when they realized that all was over.

"Bejabs, I thought sure wanst or twict it was all over wid as!" cried Barney. "Oa we wurred, it was a close call!"

"Golly," sniffed Pomp, "it would hab been a small loss if yo' had gone down in dat catytrack, sah!"

"Phwat's that, sor?" said Baraey, turning quickly.

"Yo' heah wha' I say!"

"Do yez mane to insult me?"

"Hub! dat wud he a herry hard fiag to do, Mister Maa!"

"Av yez don't show me more respcct, I'll show yez how to threat a gentleman," bluffed Barney, who was ready for a ruction. "Kape yure eye on that, sor!"

He brandished his fist in Pomp's face. The coon cut a shuffle and made a pass at the Celt.

"G'wan out ob mah way, sah! Aia't no tme to fool wif sech po' trash as yo' am, sah!"

"Whnroo," howled Baraey, "yez nre bound to havo it!"

With which he made a swipe at the coon. Had Pomp got the full force of that blow, it is safe to say that he would have felt it!

But he did not. Quick as a cat, he dodged it, and then lowered his head and made a rush at Baraey. He caught the Celt in the stomach.

Down they went in a heap, and for a time there was a general mix-up. It would have been hard to say which had the best of it.

But Frank's voice calling them soon terminated the affair, and they were obliged to hasten to the deck.

The scene presented when they arrived was an enlivening one. On either side, as far as the eye could reach, was the level expanse of the steppe.

But riding down the river bank at mad speed was a small army of Cossacks.

Wild, lawless chaps they were, right from the fastnesses of the Ukraine. They had been hunting, and long strings of ducks and other water fowl hung from their saddle horses.

Curious type of humanity they were.

The features of some of them exactly resembled those of a dog. They were dressed half in the skins of wild beasts, and wore as black and dirty as an outdoor existence of savagery could make them.

They had caught sight of the submarine boat and its foreign flag. Seeing that the craft was not under the protection of the Czar's colors, they looked upon it as legitimate prey.

They rode down to the water's edge and hailed the boat.

"What do they want?" asked Frank.

"They want us," replied Potolski. "Do you know what our fate would be if we should fall into their hands?"

"Ah, what?"

"They would impale us. That is a Cossack cruelty."

"I have heard of this barbarous practice," said Frank; "but can it be true?"

"It is true beyond description."

"When you speak of impaling their victim, pray how is it done?"

"A stake of hard wood is shaved slender and sharp at both ends. It is driven into the ground, and the victim after being bound is sat

upon it and left there, while his own weight causes the stake to pass through his body. Sometimes the unfortunate is a whole day dying in the most awful and prolonged agony."

"My God! My God!" exclaimed Frank, in horror. "That is the most awful thing I ever heard of!"

"Yet it is true."

"How inhuman!"

"Ah, you do not know the Cossack and the Tartar. Of all peoples on the face of the earth, they are the most savagely cruel."

"I have heard that."

"Heaven pity you, if you fall into their hands!"

"I should say so."

"Ah, you can see how savage they are by this near contact. They actually hope to capture us."

"But I believe not," said Frank. "Put on more speed, Baraey."

"Ay, sor!"

The Celt opened the lever wide. The Octopus sprang forward and soon would have left the Cossacks far behind. But at that moment an unexpected thing happened.

There was a terrific shock, and everyone on board was thrown from his feet.

CHAPTER IX.

OUTWITTING THE COSSACKS.

THE Octopus came to an instant halt. The machinery buzzed and the screw beat the water to a foam.

But the submarine boat could go no further. It had come to a certain stop.

"What's the matter?" cried the coon, as he sprung to his feet.

"What on earth has happened?"

"That is just what I would like to know!" exclaimed Frank. "Certainly there is something wrong."

He sprang into the pilot house. Barney was just picking himself up from the floor.

"Howly Mither!" gasped the Celt; "it's nearly kilt I nm!"

"What has happened, Barney?" asked Frank. "Aaythlug broken about the machinery?"

"Divil a bit!" replied the Celt; "shure, sor, av I was to judge from me own feelings I should say we had stuck upon something!"

"Heavens!" exclaimed Frank; "have we run aground?"

He ran out upon deck and leaned over the rail. He saw the truth at a glance.

The Octopus had run high on a sand bar, the darkness of the water having concealed its shallowness. Beyond this no material harm had been done. But surely this was enough.

The Octopus was high and fast. The electric engines were not strong enough to draw her off.

Moreover, the Cossacks saw the mishap and now felt certain of their prey. They crowded down the bank rapidly.

"We're in for it!" cried Frank; "get your rifles, boys!"

"Is it to be a fight?" asked Potolski.

"We must stand them off."

"Heaven help us if they get aboard!"

"Och, hone, an' it's all me own fault," cried Baraey; "shure it's a thick skull I have not to have seen it."

"Golly! I done tink we bettah make n show agin dem rapsallious poaty quick!" said Pomp; "dey am jes' gwine to come right out yere."

"Let them try it," cried Frank, resolutely. "We will give them a hot reception! Ready, all!"

The repeating rifles had been brought on. These were the regular sixteen shot Winchester and capable of killing at a mile.

The Cossacks leaped their horses into the water and urged them with loud yells toward the light craft. When they struck the sand bar they came on rapidly. Others swam.

"Shoot the horses first!" commanded Frank; "don't take life unless it is absolutely necessary!"

This order was obeyed.

The horses of the Cossacks began to fall with frightful rapidity. The riders were thrown into the water, but still they advanced.

The loss of their horses maddened them. They came on over the sand bar savagely.

Woe to the submarine voyagers now if the Cossacks should get aboard. Their revenge would be terrible.

Frank saw that the worst must come, so he cried:

"Take the nearest men. Shnot to wound, nat to kill!"

Crack! Crack! Crack!

The rifles kept speaking continually. In each case the aim was effective.

Of course this sort of thing could not last forever. Such steady firing began to tell.

Suddenly the Cossacks began to fall back. The waters of the river were reddened with their blood and that of their horses.

It had become plain to them that they could not capture the submarine boat in her present position by open assault.

They withdrew to try some other plan. What this was soon became manifest.

The ring of axes was heard up the river. Here, near the left bank, was a wooded island.

Their plan was to fell trees and build a raft. Rapidly the work went on.

Frank saw that if they succeeded, and should float the raft down

upon the Octopus, the result might be serious; so he was on his guard.

It was certainly necessary to at once free the submarine boat from the sand bar.

How to do this was a question.

Darkness was now coming on rapidly. It did not stop the work of the raft builders, however.

They had now gotten the raft almost into a state of completion. Upon its forward end they were building a high bulwark as a defense against the deadly rifle balls.

"Och, Mister Frank," cried Barney, "av we only had the electric gun now!"

This was true enough. A dynamite shell, thrown against the raft, would very quickly spoil the plans of the foe.

But the electric gun was in Readestown, so it was out of the question.

"Do you think they will attempt to float down upon us to-night?" asked Frank, of Potolski.

"The Cossack always fights after dark," replied the count. "In fact, they will wait for darkness."

"They do not count upon the search-light."

"Evidently not!"

Potolski sniffed the air and looked at the barometer.

"We shall have a storm before many hours," he said.

Even as he spoke, the distant dull rumble of thunder was heard. Lightning flashed across the darkened sky. The air felt heavy and damp.

After a time pattering drops of rain began to fall. The Cossacks on the bank withdrew to the shelter of a clump of trees.

Those working on the raft desisted as the rain increased.

"That will win time for us!" cried Potolski, jubilantly. "They will not dare the elements. The storm will be heavy."

This last prediction was verified.

The storm proved heavy. It descended in utter torrents. Lightning blazed and thunder boomed.

For two hours the deluge came down. As a result, the river began to rise.

Then a sudden, joyful truth burst upon the voyagers. The submarine boat rocked and swayed as the water rushed over the sand bar.

"If the river rises enough, we shall float off!" cried Potolski.

"She is already afloat!" cried Barney. "Shure, yez can feel it!"

"On my word, I believe it!" declared Frank.

"She is moving!"

"Golly! we're all right!"

"Bejabers, they'll niver catch us now!"

Down the stream the Octopus began to drift. Frank did not start the propeller until she was in deep water.

The darkness was intense. He had caused all lights to be extinguished so as to deceive the Cossacks.

They had built camp-fires on shore, and were cowering under their skin pouches to escape the wet.

As a matter of fact none of them dreamed of the stranded boat getting away. They fancied her all secure.

While at that moment she was full two miles away, and racing down the wild current of the Dneiper on the way to the sea.

All that night the Octopus traveled on. When daylight came she was far beyond the reach of the Cossacks.

She was in the reedy, marshy delta of the great river.

Great expanses of swamp were upon either hand. Dark lagoons and marshy islands.

Waterfowl were everywhere. They flew in great whirling flocks over the Octopus.

Every moment now they were nearing the sea. The day was bright and clear after the storm.

Frank now began to keep a good lookout, for he doubted not that he had not heard the last of the affair with the Russian authorities.

Count Potolski was in high spirits.

He seemed to think that they had escaped the worst of the perils. What was before them he looked upon lightly.

"We can fool the Turkish authorities," he said, "but not the Russians. They are very keen!"

"Well," said Frank Reade, Jr., "we will do the best we can!"

"And that is enough," said the count.

Already the breezes of the open sea could be felt. On drifted the Octopus through miles of reedy land.

Then the mouth of the river broadened. The reeds fell away and the great sea came into view.

But a startling sight met the gaze of the voyagers.

There, anchored almost in the river's mouth, was a gun-boat. Beyond it was another, and still beyond, a third.

"Humph!" said Frank.

"They are waiting for us!" declared the count.

"So it seems."

"Will they get us?"

"Not if I know it!"

The gun boats all flew the Russian flag. Doubtless they had torpedoed and netted the river.

Feeling assured of this, Frank decided to descend at once. So the Octopus was sent to the bottom.

Down she settled. The search-light was put in use and the exploration began.

The Octopus went on slowly, feeling her way. It was difficult enough to see the fine wires.

Suddenly Barney sprang to the keyboard and stopped the boat. He was just in time.

Her bow nearly collided with a wire attached to a torpedo which would have blown her to atoms.

Quickly Frank donned his diving suit and went out.

It did not take him long to cut the wires. Gingerly he did this.

The Octopus crept along slowly for there was great danger.

Nearer every moment they drew to the war ships. The water was not very deep and presently the hull of one was seen.

Frank did a bit of reflecting.

These foes were seeking his life. In truth it would have been in accordance with the rules of warfare if he had simply placed a bomb under the war ship and blown it to atoms.

It was a great temptation. But he could not do it.

It savored too much of human slaughter. So he passed on, looking for new wires.

Not until far out of the river's mouth was it deemed safe to proceed. Then the Octopus sprang to the surface.

She was seen by the war ships, for one of them fired after her. Then they all gave chase.

But they might as well have chased an ignis-fatuum. The Octopus rounded the point of Tendra and had the Black Sea before her.

She was given full chance now to test her powers of speed.

CHAPTER X.

CHASED BY THE FOE.

THE Octopus fairly romped away from her pursuers. They were not in the chase at all.

Soon they were hull down on the horizon. So elated were all on board, that when Barney proposed three cheers, they were given with a will.

"Bo me sowl," cried the Celt, "it's a folno batin' we give thim! Shure, whin a Rooshian thinks he's a match fer a Yankee, he's makin' a mishtake; that's all."

"I believe you're right, Barney," said the count. "The Yankees are not to be beaten."

"We're not out of the woods yet," said Frank, gravely.

"Begorra, I don't care if it's a Turk," cried the Celt. "Shure Mister Frank cud make fools av all av thim."

"Don't be too sure of that, Barney," said Frank. "Wait until we are beyond the Dardanelles, or for that matter, beyond the point of Gibraltar."

"That is true," agreed Potolski. "There is no real safety until we are in the open Atlantic. Even then we shall not care to meet a Russian war ship."

"Golly!" cried Pomp; "I'se jes' beginning to banker fer Readestown. Yo' kin bet on dat!"

"Yez always was a homesick moker!" declared Barney.

"Hi, hi! Don' yo' say nuffin! Does ye' 'membah de time da' yo' was in de Readestown lock-up fo' stealin'? I done reckon yo' was homesick."

"I warn't guilty, yez kin know!" declared Barney.

"Oh, I know dey provod yo' to be innocent. But dat warn't all. Yo' was dreful homesick."

Barney fell to muttering and said no more. The reminiscences presented by Pomp were not pleasant to him.

He was perfectly willing to forget them. Indeed, he had already done so. But Pomp revived the affair.

It was only the coon's salutary way of keeping a line of restraint upon the Celt, on the principle that it is ever one's friend who tells of one's faults.

For a whole day the Octopus sailed rapidly over the waters of the Black Sea. Not until the second day did any incident of note occur.

Then suddenly several sails appeared on the horizon directly ahead. They were at such a regular distance from each other, and so uniform in line, that the attention of the voyagers was claimed at once.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Frank, "I should say it was a squadron!"

"That is just what it is," said Potolski, "and nothing else."

"Russian ships?"

"I hardly kuow. We shall have to get nearer to see what their flags are."

Frank procured his glass and studied the distant vessels long and slowly.

Finally he closed the telescope and said, with conviction:

"They are looking for us."

Potolski gave a start.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "do you believe it?"

"I do."

"Russians?"

"No."

"Turks?"

"Exactly."

"But how have they learned of our mission here, and why should they stop us?"

"It is easy to see. Neither the Russian authorities nor the Sultan of Turkey are going to see one million in gold in discovered treasure pass out of their dominions without an attempt to secure a slice. Be sure of that!"

"And the Russians have telegraphed the Porte to detain us at Constantinople!"

"Just so!"

"Then these ships have been sent out to detain us!"

"Certainly!"

The voyagers continued to watch the ships as they drew nearer. Suddenly signal flags were seen flying at their mastheads.

"They have sighted us!" said Frank; "they are signaling each other!"

"You are right!"

The Turkish vessels, mostly corvettes, were eight in number, and arranged in the form of a crescent. In this manner they were sweeping the sea.

That they had sighted the submarine boat there was no doubt. At once their formation began to change.

In response to the signals the points of the crescent began to draw in like horns and the half circle to contract.

It was evidently their purpose to surround the Octopus and either capture or sink her.

Being all armed ships Frank knew that it would be suicidal to allow them to come too near.

So he checked the speed of the Octopus.

The war ships now were hull above the horizon. When within a mile of the submarine boat, the foremost ship fired a shot at the Octopus.

It fell short. Either the gunner's aim was bad or there was a lack of powder for the shot was a poor one.

"They will have to aim better than that," declared Frank, with a laugh, "or we need not fear them much."

"You are right," agreed Potolski.

Frank, however, kept a keen lookout. He gradually slackened the speed of the submarine boat.

When within three quarters of a mile of the oncoming ships, he saw plainly that it was of no use to attempt drawing nearer.

He dared not run between them, and it would be madness to attempt to go around the half circle.

There was but one safe method, and this was to go under the fleet. So he opened the tank and let the Octopus sink.

Down she went for several fathoms. Then Frank let her run at full speed under water.

For several miles she ran on in this fashion. Then curiosity led the young inventor to accomplish what came near proving a fatal move.

He sent the Octopus again to the surface. He expected to see the war ships far in the rear.

To his consternation one was seen not a quarter of a mile away. Before Frank could send the Octopus down again the catastrophe occurred.

A shot came from the distant vessel, and passed literally through the cabin of the Octopus, leaving a great gaping hole in her.

Of course it was above the water line, but it prevented her sinking again for safety.

A cry of alarm pealed from the lips of Potolski.

"My soul! We are lost!"

Frank acted with the rapidity of thought. He knew that there was now but one chance.

This was to get out of range just as quickly as possible. He knew that the Octopus could sail faster than the more cumbersome war vessel.

So he opened the motor lever and let the submarine boat fly. Shots now came flying all about her.

One carried away the flagstaff and another grazed her bow. But no further damage was done.

Before the Turk could come about in his slow fashion the Octopus was far out of range.

The pursuit now began in earnest. The other ships joined in it.

But still the Octopus led.

"If we can keep out of range until dark," said Frank, "we shall give them the slip."

"But that does not wipe out all the danger," said Potolski.

"Why not?"

"We are crippled."

"Very true."

"We can never hope to pass the Bosphorus or the Dardanelles except under water."

"That is true again. But we must do the best we can."

"We shall be hunted from one end of this sea to the other," groaned Potolski. "We can never get away overland with the gold. The project is ruined."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Frank, lightly.

"Have you a plan?"

"Wait and see."

The Octopus kept increasing the distance between her and her pursuers. But suddenly a sail showed dead ahead.

Very soon it was seen to be another Turkish war ship.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the young inventor, in dismay, "is this place alive with Turkish vessels?"

"The Sultan has sent out his entire fleet," averred Potolski.

"I believe you."

They were now between two fires. Oh, how easy it would have been to slip the foe had the Octopus been able to go to the bottom.

Frank saw what was his only hope. This was to veer to the east and try and outrun the pursuers on a new tack.

This would take him off his course and away from Constantinople, but after all this was what he wanted. For it would have been suicidal to have ventured near the Bosphorus in his present plight.

The Turkish pursuers changed their course.

It was evident that they felt sure now of eventually running their prey to earth. But Frank was as cool as ever.

"We'll fool them!" he said, carelessly.

Fortunately nightfall was not an hour distant. By doubling on his tack and placing the sailing vessels at a disadvantage in regard to wind, Frank held his distance until darkness shut down.

Then he believed that he had it all his own way.

Yet, still another obstacle presented itself. Suddenly another sail appeared in his path.

Another war vessel it was. He was now completely surrounded.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed the young inventor in amazement, "is this sea alive with war vessels? What shall we do now?"

"Heaven know!" groaned Potolski.

"We are in a trap."

"Yes, but we must never yield. Sooner than deliver ourselves up, let us sink the Octopus and die by drowning."

"We will do neither as yet," said Frank, coolly. "It is now a case of dodge. If they don't hit us under the water line, we'll yet slide by them."

"Heaven aid us!"

Frank now started away on a new tack. He took the widest space between the war vessels.

On shot the Octopus.

Darkness was coming, but not in time. The fugitives were now between two flying ships, and almost within gunshot of both.

Suddenly the cannon balls began to fly. They passed over and around the little craft. Her very smallness was her protection.

For the Turkish gunners were not of the best, and the target was an exceedingly small one.

CHAPTER XI.

FLIGHT AND PURSUIT.

It was a terrific gantlet which the Octopus ran. The shot fell about her like hail.

But the Yankee flag yet floated defiantly from her stern, and she shot along like a meteor.

She passed literally between the two war vessels and again scampered out to sea. But the whole cordon now began to draw down upon her.

It is possible that had daylight continued, the little craft would have been cornered.

But the night was rapidly shutting down, and with it a dense fog.

Under cover of this her chances were good. Frank hung at the key-board.

On ran the Octopus and thicker grew the fog. In a short while it was a dense blanket over all.

The foe vanished from sight. Then Frank turned and ran back on his course.

It was all at random in the darkness, but he kept on with all pluck. At times they passed within easy hearing of the war vessels.

But they were unseen. The Octopus was safe for the time being.

Potolski drew a deep breath of relief.

"That was all very clever work," he said, "but what next?"

"You shall see," said Frank. "First I am going for the eastern shore."

"Away from Constantinople?"

"Yes."

"You will strike the Russians there."

"Very well. We will give them the slip, too."

"I have nothing but admiration for your generalship," said Potolski. "It has brought us out of a serious scrape."

Frank laughed.

"It was very simple work," he said—"only a case of dodge."

Through the fog the Octopus for hours made an eastern course. Daylight came at last.

The shores of Caucasasia were plainly visible in the light of the morning sun. But the horizon was free from sails.

The Octopus had given its pursuers the finest kind of a slip. They had been skillfully outwitted.

Frank selected an obscure bay along the Caucasian shore and ran into it. Here anchor was dropped.

Then he opened the cabin door and stepped out on deck.

The orifice made by the cannon shot in the cabin wall was about a foot square and with jagged edges. The thin steel had been twisted and badly warped.

Frank examined it carefully.

"What do you think of it?" asked Potolski, eagerly.

"It can be easily prepared," replied Frank, coolly.

"You don't mean it!"

"Yes, I do."

Frank called to Barney to bring tools and a portable electric forge from the vessel's hold. Then work was begun.

The jagged edges were hammered down and made smooth. Then a bit of sheet steel was put over the orifice.

Rivet holes were bored through the steel at intervals of half an inch. The steel cap was then riveted firmly to cover the orifice.

It was a patch upon the steel surface, but it did not present at all a bad appearance. It was at least most effective.

And this was the main thing. Frank made it water tight, and once more the Octopus was as good as ever.

It was a joyful realization to Potolski. He could hardly contain himself.

"You are a wonderful man, Frank Reade, Jr.," he said. "There are few could have done such wonders."

"Only a little forethought," said Frank, modestly. "We could not have done it had we not provided ourselves with the necessary tools and materials before leaving home."

"We can now hope to pass the Turkish Dardanelles safely."

"Barring accident."

"Of course."

"No doubt we shall find many submarine mines and torpedoes there. We must be on our guard."

"Just so!"

All of the voyagers were exhausted. They had slept but little for two days and nights.

So Frank suggested that they embrace the opportunity for a bit of rest. But Barney and Pomp declared they could not sleep in the daytime.

"Very well," said Frank. "We will remain here until to-morrow morning. Then we will start for Constantinople."

This delighted the two jokers. They had been studying the rugged coast and were anxious for an opportunity to go ashore.

This they did, while Frank and Potolski rested on board.

The two jokers soon returned with a fine bag of game, as wild ducks and geese were plenty. Thus the day drifted slowly away.

That night all slept soundly.

When daybreak came the Octopus was once more en route for Constantinople. But on emerging from the little bay, Potolski clutched Frank's arm.

"We should not have been safe here much longer," he said.

He pointed to a distant white sail far up the coast. That it was one of the war ships was certain.

Like Sleuth hounds they were yet in quest of their prey. But this time the Octopus had no reason to fear them.

It would be only necessary to keep out of the range of their big guns to be assured of safety.

The distant war ship appeared to have sighted the Octopus, for suddenly it changed its course. It began very quickly to give chase.

"We're in for it," cried Frank. "No doubt they will chase us all the way to Constantinople."

"But will they catch us?"

"Not much."

For hours the white sail hung on the horizon. But it gradually grew smaller and smaller until finally it disappeared altogether.

The run across the Black Sea was made in quick time. Almost before the voyagers realized it, one morning the headlands of the Bosphorus showed before them.

The narrow strait was filled with Turkish vessels. Frank did not venture too near with the Octopus.

He did quite a bit of reconnoitering first. Then he finally decided upon a plan of action.

"I believe we can run through there safely after dark," he said.

"Why not make the submarine journey?" asked Potolski.

"For the fact that we might get into trouble with some of their torpedoes or submarine mines."

"You are right," agreed the Pole; "let us take the safest course."

So the Octopus hung low on the horizon until darkness shut down. Then it drew slowly down toward the danger point.

Day and night the utmost vigilance was maintained by the Turks at this entrance to the bay of Constantinople. It was as if they were constantly dreading the attack of a foe.

The Octopus slid noiselessly down into the channel in the pitchy darkness.

The great black hulled vessels lay swinging at their moorings. The forts on either side were ablaze with electric lights.

Here guards were constantly on the parapets. It was a fatal thing for them should they relax their vigilance.

Silently the Octopus glided into the strait.

She made hardly a ripple in the water. Frank was at the keyboard, keeping a sharp lookout.

Every light on board was out. Frank's finger was constantly on the tank lever ready to sink the Octopus instantly, if it became necessary.

Now she was well into the channel. Just ahead was a great war vessel. On her decks were guards, and at her open ports were heavy guns.

Lanterns hung in her rigging. But Frank estimated the distance just right, and the Octopus glided by in the outer fringe of gloom.

Like a shadow the submarine boat went on through the gantlet.

Already they were half way through. Each of the voyagers held his breath in the most excited manner.

Now the great black hulls of the guard ships faded into the darkness. Suddenly a bright light shone dead ahead.

Frank turned the Octopus' prow to the right quick as a flash. Loud voices were heard.

It was a small steam vessel, no doubt a Government launch. It had shot into view very suddenly from behind the anchored ships.

A more critical moment could not be imagined.

The time for action was very brief. Frank pressed the helm hard about, and the Octopus bolted for a dense wall of gloom on the north side of the channel.

Would she become submerged in it in time? Discovery now meant death. Frank knew this.

But the main question in his mind was as to the purpose of this launch. Had she come out to patrol the waters and seek for the Octopus?

Was it really known to the Turkish authorities that the submarine boat with her immense treasure had entered the Bosphorus?

Perhaps she had been permitted to enter unmolested that she might become entrapped. All these things passed rapidly through Frank's mind.

It was certain that for a moment the fate of the Octopus hung in the balance.

On came the launch.

A small search-light in her bow made a narrow pathway of radiance ahead. The voyagers clung to the cabin windows and watched her.

Every nerve was tense and taut as a liddle string. One moment more, and the bank of blackness would hide the Octopus.

The next moment she did shoot into it like an arrow.

But at that very instant a shout came from the launch. Almost instantly the small search-light was turned upon the Octopus.

Then a chorus of yells went up, and pistol shots rang out. This was an alarm signal.

Lights flashed from ships to shore. A cannon boomed in the distant fort. Frank knew that the crisis had come.

He could have sunk the Octopus in an instant.

But he remembered the torpedoes, and chose to run the gantlet without risking an encounter with them if he could.

He acted quickly and with great determination. He turned on the powerful rays of his search-light.

Down the channel he sent a brief flash. Then across to the forts and back to the other shore.

Then he extinguished it. That one brief sweeping glance told him just how matters stood.

This was what he wanted to know. Quick as a flash the Octopus shot on down the channel.

Frank saw that a clear course was before him. A short ways beyond was the entrance to the Sea of Marmora.

On rushed the Octopus like a specter. Tremendous commotion was in the rear.

The alarm had spread, and forts and ships were flashing search-lights everywhere. Launches were flying about, and all was excitement.

"By Jove!" cried Frank; "once we enter the bay we will fool them."

Potolski was intensely excited.

"I am praying for our success," he said. "Oh, Mr. Reade, you are performing such a wonder as few others could do. These straits are considered impregnable."

"To all save the submarine boat," laughed Frank. "But we must not count our chickens too soon. We are not through them yet. There are barriers yet before us of a terrible kind."

CHAPTER XII.

THE END.

"Ah, but the Dardanelles are not to be compared with the Bosphorus," declared Potolski; "to be sure there are great forts there, but the Sultan has given especial efforts to fortifying the Bosphorus on account of Russia."

"That may be!" agreed Frank; "but they will now be on the lookout for us!"

"Oh, I believe you. I think we can be none too guarded in our course. But we have just won a triumph."

"I am satisfied!"

"So am I!"

Out of the Bosphorus the Octopus now ran and into the bay of Constantinople.

Scutari on one side and the capital of Turkey on the other. On all sides were shipping, but they were mostly merchant vessels and galleys.

None of these dreamed that shooting through their midst was a vessel which all the Sultan's navy had in vain tried to capture.

A little insignificant craft, with its Yankee captain had set at defiance all the ingenuity of the Turks. Had passed the most impregnable waterway in the world with the greatest of ease.

One shot from one of the heavy cannon frowning down upon the strait would have annihilated the little craft. But as elusive as a will-o'-the-wisp, the Octopus evaded that shot.

On among the intricate mass of anchored vessels ran the submarine boat.

In some cases sleepy guards on a ship's deck hailed them. But not a gun was fired.

To be sure the government launches were in hot pursuit. But they had not gained a peg.

The city of Constantinople, the Star of the East, with its twinkling lights, lay to the north. The voyagers gazed upon the enlivening scene.

"What do you suppose the Turkish newspapers will be saying to-morrow?" asked Frank. "Will they not be a bit sore?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied Potolski. "It is possible that reparation will be demanded from the United States Government."

"For what?"

"For the gold which is slipping through their robber clutches!"

"They have no claim upon it!"

"Of course not. But you do not know the rapacious Turk if you think they will not try to establish a claim."

Frank laughed at this.

"I fear they will have some trouble," he declared. "I don't believe that our Secretary of State would hear of such a thing."

"Of course he would not. It is a case for Russia, if any nation."

Yet she has no legal claim."

The Octopus had eluded her pursuers and was now in the sea of Marmora. Frank now changed his plans.

"We cannot reach the Dardanelles in time to attempt a passage to-night," he said; "but I think we can run through to-morrow night." Potolski's face clouded.

"Procrastination is dangerous," he said; "it gives the enemy a chance to prepare a trap."

"Yet it would be madness to attempt the Dardanelles in daylight."

"Unless under water!"

"That is risky!"

"Very true! Then what is your plan?"

"This," said Frank. "We will sink the boat and remain quietly at the bottom of the Sea of Marmora until to-morrow night. Then we will try to run the blockade as we did in the Bosphorus. If we cannot we will try the submarine trick."

"Very well," agreed Potolski. "Your discernment is greater than mine, and has carried us safely through thus far."

"I do not wish to undertake anything foolhardy," said Frank. "There are many chances against us."

"Indeed there are. But you will not sink the boat yet?"

"Not until almost in the mouth of the Dardanelles."

"Correct."

For hours the Octopus sailed on. At times the thunder of guns sounded in their rear.

But Frank knew that they had successfully eluded the foe. For the time being they were safe.

Yet they were still in the maws of a gigantic trap.

In the Sea of Marmora, they were between the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles. Either was considered almost impassable by the strongest ship of war.

Strategy had brought the Octopus thus far on the journey. Whether it would carry her through the Dardanelles or not, it was impossible to say.

Doubtless the Turkish authorities would take every precaution to prevent her passage of the Dardanelles.

But Frank said grimly:

"The only method by which they can stop me that I know of, is to spread a steel net across the strait or build a dam or dry the passage up."

Of course he feared the torpedoes more or less. Yet he had the power with ordinary precaution to disarm them.

Potolski was not so sanguine.

"It is my opinion," he said, "that we will have to make a submarine passage of the Dardanelles."

"All right," agreed Frank, "if we have to we will."

The day passed by the voyagers at the bottom of the Sea of Marmora was an uneventful one.

They passed it mostly in sleep. But when the clock announced that darkness had again shut down in the upper world all were astir.

Frank made everything ready for the possibility of being obliged to grapple with torpedoes. Then he sent the Octopus to the surface.

As good fortune had it, it was another inky black night.

The sky was overcast with clouds and the distant dull boom of thunder announced an oncoming storm.

"We must make the effort before midnight," said Frank.

"Why?" asked Potolski.

"Easy enough. The lightning will get to playing before then, and it might give us away!"

"Then why not try it at once?"

"We had better go slow!"

Frank hovered about the entrance to the strait for some while. Then he let the Octopus gently glide between the two rocky shores. She was in the Dardanelles.

On either side were the awful forts with their tiers of guns capable of riddling every inch of the strait's surface with shot and shell.

The strongest ironclad ship would hardly face such a possibility of extinction. Yet the frail Octopus was gliding along between these two deadly tornadoes ready to burst upon her.

Frank's nerves were steel.

His hand was upon the tank lever, his gaze strained into the gloom.

He could tell that he was in the channel simply by means of the high cliffs outlined against the murky sky. Steadily on glided the Octopus.

It was an awful strain. Of course no light could be used aboard the submarine boat.

Consequently they could never be sure that the channel was clear before them. They might collide at any moment with some terrible destroyer.

Several times Frank thought that they were discovered.

Once a search-light from one of the forts played up the channel. But fortunately the Octopus did not come in its path, though at one time this was not fifty yards away.

On glided the Octopus.

The voyagers held their breath. Would they deceive the Turks this time?

Time was passing.

They were well into the strait.

Yet many miles lay before them, and almost every foot of the distance was beset with peril most deadly. The chances were a dozen to one against them.

Barney lay upon his face, with an ear to the pilot house window. Suddenly he whispered:

"Misther Frank!"

"Well?"

"Shure there's something dead ahead!"

In an instant Frank pressed the button reversing the propeller. The Octopus came to a full stop.

The dull heaving of a steam boiler could be plainly heard. Then the swish of water followed.

Some craft was passing within a few yards. That it was a government launch there was no doubt.

That it was groping about looking for the Octopus was quite certain. Again it was certain that it would fail in its mission.

For it passed swiftly by and went on into the gloom. The voyagers drew a deep breath of relief.

"We are past the heaviest forts," said Potolski, finally. "God grant that we may pass the rest!"

But it was not to be supposed that the Dardanelles were to be left open for the passage of the escaping Octopus. Once again a distant sound of steam was heard.

Then suddenly from one of the forts a flash light showed up the channel. To the surprise of our adventurers, they saw a line of gunboats extended across the channel.

Chains were suspended between these boats. Instantly Frank opened the tank valve and the Octopus sank.

And now began a long and tedious task. Frank and Barney went out on the bow with pincers. For hours they worked steadily.

In the distance of a mile they reckoned that more than one hundred torpedo wires had been cut.

Had any one of these exploded the result must have been deadly. The greatest of skill and care was used.

When finally the Octopus came to the surface she was far out of the deadly gateway and beyond peril. The Turks did not discover this fact for a week, but kept the cordou of boats waiting for her appearance.

The last ordeal was past. A clear course now lay before our adventurers.

Across the Mediterranean the Octopus sped, and through the Straits of Gibraltar. Then she was safe from frowning guns, and avaricious and unscrupulous monarchs.

Three weeks later she passed under the guns of Fort Hamilton in New York harbor safe and free. Here Potolski landed and deposited his gold in a safety vault. He gave Barney and Pomp a princely share of it, but Frank refused any. The Octopus then returned to Readstown.

A month later Potolski and Frank were both summoned to Washington by the Secretary of State.

A complaint from the Turkish Government, through their Minister Murad Bey, had been received, to the effect that several Americans, in a ship-of-war, had flagrantly set the laws of Turkey at defiance and run the Dardanelles with a stolen treasure recovered from Turkish soil. Demand was made by the Sultan for the return of the same and the heads of the culprits.

When the Honorable Secretary heard the story as told by Frank and easily substantiated, he laughed.

"It is evident that Turkey as well as Russia, has not yet emerged from the ruck of mediæval times," he said. "I think you can rest secure in the recovery of your gold, Count Potolski. Good luck to you and your colonization scheme. I will explain all to Murad Bey."

"This is truly the land of the free and a haven for the oppressed," said Potolski, fervently.

And so ended the incident. When the Sultan learned that there was a possibility of reparation being demanded from him for inhuman treatment of an American subject, he dropped his little game of bluff.

This ends our story.

Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp are at present in Readstown. Count Potolski is in the West formulating his colonization scheme.



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